

Postcards

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**Flotsam and Jetsam: Art, Allegory, and Shipwreck
in the Twenty-First Century (II)**DAVID BRIAN HOWARD
NSCAD University, Canada**Abstract**

This allegorical postcard is organized around two groups of photographs. The first group was the result of a joint collaboration with the Vancouver artist Scott Saunders and produced photographs which have peppered several of my previous texts published by *American, British and Canadian Studies*. The second is a series of photographs taken by Scott Saunders from the window of his apartment in Vancouver in which he documents the street life constantly ebbing and flowing on the sidewalk below. The catalyst for bringing these two groups together was a photograph I took several years ago in Sambro, Nova Scotia (a small fishing village located just outside of the city of Halifax) depicting a forlorn sunken fishing vessel. The term “flotsam” is applied, according to the *Oxford Reference Dictionary*, to “the wreckage of a ship or its cargo floating on or washed up by the sea,” while “jetsam” describes the things or objects deliberately “thrown away, especially from a ship at sea and that float toward land.” Combined, these images of words and devastated human beings are caught in an apparently endless circulation of violence and contingency located at the heart of the urban fabric of a modernity bereft of any horizon of hope, redemption, or rescue.

Keywords: shipwreck, flotsam, jetsam, modernity, allegory, ephemerality, epistemology



Photograph from “Words! Words!” This was a joint text and performance piece in collaboration with the Vancouver artist Scott Saunders and the Nova Scotian artist Angela Penton. The project occurred in late August 2014 in Halifax/Kjipuktuk (located on *Eskikewa’kik*, one of the seven districts of *Mi’kma’ki*, unceded and ancestral land of the *Mi’kmaq* Nation). Photographs by Todd McLean.

“The meaning of a word in its place
derives both from the word’s lateral reach,
its contacts with its neighbors in a statement,
and from its reach through and out of the text into the outer world,
the matrix of its contemporary and historical reference.”

(Lyn Hejinian, “Language of Inquiry,” in Sarah Nolan, *Unnatural Ecopoetics: Unlikely Spaces in Contemporary Poetry*. U of Nevada P, 2017, p. 47.)

“THE CIRCUITOUS PATH TO THE BEAUTIFUL. – If the beautiful is to be identified as that which gives pleasure – and thus sang the Muses once – the useful is often the necessary circuitous path to the beautiful, and has a perfect right to spurn the short-sighted censure of men who live for the moment who will not wait, and who think that they can reach all good things without ever taking a circuitous path.”

(Friedrich Nietzsche (Helen Zimmern and Paul E. Cohn, translators), *Human, All-Too-Human*. Read Books, 2019, p. 319.)

“Language is ‘a bridge between the world and these other things . . . To utter a word is to affix a seal as a witness of man’s presence. The word is not part of the world; it is the seal of man.’ Through our engagement with language, we span the gap between self and world.”

(Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy*, in Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris, editors. *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*. U of Alabama P, 2010, p. 231.)

“New constellations of meanings crystallize as every word – each with a multiplicity of meanings – enters into new relations with another. Here we find a pedagogy rooted in fantasy and the deformation of existing meanings . . .”

(Sam Dolbear, Esther Leslie, and Sebastian Truskolaski, "Introduction: Walter Benjamin and the Magnetic Play of Words," in Walter Benjamin (Translated and edited by Sam Dolbear, Esther Leslie, and Sebastian Truskolaski), *The Storyteller: Tales Out of Loneliness*. Verso, 2016, pp. xxv-xxvi.)

"Psychogeography: a beginner's guide. Unfold a street map . . ., place a glass, rim down, anywhere on the map, and draw round its edge. Pick up the map, go out into the city, and walk the circle, keeping as close as you can to the curve. Record the circle, keeping it as close as you can to the curve. Record the experience as you go, in whatever medium you favour: film, photograph, manuscript, tape. Catch the textual run-off of the streets; the graffiti, the branded litter, the snatches of conversation. Cut for sign. Log the data-stream. Be alert to the happenstances of metaphors, watch for visual rhymes, coincidences, analogies, family resemblances, the changing woods of the street. Complete the circle, and the record ends. Walking makes for content; footage for footage."

(Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography*. Pocket Essentials, 2010, p. 9.)

"Inevitably, under such critical pressures, these practices would come to discover that under current conditions they have assumed as one of their primary tasks the effacement of any reflection on social class. And then we must further pressure artistic practices to reflect on this disavowal, one of the guarantors of an artist's economic success in the present. After all, the enduring and comprehensive amnesia of class is a foundational condition for the culture of the neoliberalist petite bourgeoisie."

(Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth Century Art*. MIT Press, 2015, p. xxxix.)

"In the banal communication and trivial discourse of everyday life, only the region of signals and its borderland of signs are brought into play. Thus traffic lights, the Highway Code, its application and its consequences, the accidents which do or do not happen as a result, are in themselves sufficient to provide clichés for conversation to an enormous

number of people on a virtually worldwide scale. If the motorcar has modified the entire ‘world of objects’, it has also modified the semantic field; it plays a key role in the trivialization of the ‘modern world’, something against which other aspects of modernity are reacting.”

(Henri Lefebvre (John Moore, translator), *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, September 1959-May 1961*. Verso, 2011, p. 286.)

“Words and movement, then, become coexistent – and assume paramount importance. A fixed word is one that loses its ability to shift; in a text as large and as continuously re-constituted . . . , the line between “visible and invisible” is a crucial one. Words that move enact the dynamism that has always, characterized such a fluidity. Words further become mines for the hyperactivity inherent in links. It is writing that propels words into such an “interchange.”

(Loss Pequeño Glazier, *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries*. U of Alabama P, 2002, p. 59.)

“. . . rigidly fixed words, expressions, verses that, like a malleable mass, which has later cooled and hardened, preserve in me the imprint of the collision between a larger collective and myself. Just as, when you awake, a certain kind of significant dream survives in the form of words though all the rest of the dream content has vanished, here isolated words have remained in place as marks of catastrophic encounters.”

(Benjamin, *Berlin Chronicle*, qtd. in Esther Leslie, “Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin,” in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, editors, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*. Fordham UP, 2010, p. 129.)

“It is signs and images – the world of signs and images – that tend to fit the interstices in question. Signs of happiness, of satisfaction. Signs and images of nature, of Eros. Images and signs of history, of authenticity, of style. Signs of the world: of the other world, and of another – different –

world. Neo-this and neo-that, consumed as novelties, and signs of the old, the venerated, the admirable. Images and signs of the future. Signs and images of the urban, of ‘urbanness.’”

(Henri Lefebvre, (Donaldson Nicholson Smith, translator), *The Production of Space*. Wiley Blackwell, 1992, p. 389.)

“The realm of art is expanded with previously forbidden elements of life. The notion of hell changes. It becomes commonplace. The relationships between heroes change after death.

The old world explores the meaning of life before death. The Olympian gods and goddesses are examined with a critical eye. First, they argue with one another, then they are cross-examined and must answer new questions, as Cyniscus interrupts Zeus, exposing him in the contradictions of mythology.”

(Viktor Shklovsky (Shushan Avagyan, translator), *Bowstring: On the Dissimilarity of the Similar*. Dalkey Archive Press, 2011, p. 149.)

“At the end of the twentieth century the work of art not only became lost in the spate of words, sounds and images in the universal environment that once would have been called ‘art’, but also vanished in this dissolution of the aesthetic experience in the sphere where it is impossible to distinguish between feelings that have developed within us and those that have been brought in from outside. In these circumstances, how can we speak of art?”

(Eric Hobsbawm, *Fractured Times: Culture and Society in the Twentieth Century*. Little, Brown Book Group, 2013, p. 19.)

“The code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures ... so many fragments of something that has always been *already* read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that *already*.”

(Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*, (1975), in Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*. Methuen and Company, 1983, p. 124.)

“I’m in words, made of words, others’ words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, a world, the whole world is here with me, I’m the air, the walls . . . I’m all these words all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling. . . . Words arrive from nowhere, to no purpose, without direction, and without result. They follow one upon the other according to a principle of randomness, a principle that is, in principle, self-defeating: “Someone speaks, someone hears, no need to go any further . . . It goes on by itself, it drags on by itself, from word to word, a laboring whirl, you are in it somewhere, everywhere.”

(Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Malloy, Malone Dies, The Unspeakable*, qtd. in Gerald R. Bruns, *Interruptions: The Fragmentary Aesthetic in Modern Literature*. U of Alabama P, 2018, p. 39.)

“Art emigrates to a standpoint that is no longer a standpoint at all,” Adorno observed, “because there are no longer standpoints from which the catastrophe could be named.”

(Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, in Peter E. Gordon, *Adorno and Existence*. Harvard UP, 2016, p. 107.)

“The bourgeois – and it is the petty bourgeois we have specifically in mind – is an artist. He is an educated character, but sufficiently independent of books to have his own ideas. Whether from experience or from close proximity, he has known enough wealth to enable him not to have to think about it constantly; he is fundamentally indifferent to indifferent matters, and was made for poverty like no one else. He is without prejudices, even exalted ones; without illusions and without hope. He is the first person to demand justice for others, and the first to suffer it,

if need be. On earth, where he has received everything but his just deserts, he expects nothing more, nor does he expect to fare better in the world to come. Yet he takes pleasure in his unpretentious life, and is able to enjoy what it offers without maligning it. The world that has brought forth such people has not failed in its task. The path that leads to wisdom is not an evil one. This is why there is still hope for the disinherited. This is why we must not dispute in advance a person's right to whatever society can offer."

(Jacques Chardonne qtd. in Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927-1934*. Harvard UP, 2005, p.747.)

"The art idiot, as a rule, is a very respectable, but hard-working person. All week long he sweats around the navel and under the armpits. Can he be blamed if he wants to indulge his own preferences of art on Sundays? Must his brain, searching for relaxation, strain on the seventh day as well? Now, too, there are works that are absolutely disquieting, or that go so far as to breed discord. . . . Today, everybody wants to be a unique phenomenon.

And what about us art idiots? Are we complete nonentities? Artists live off of us, who buy their books and paintings. And besides, don't they enjoy our democracy? Therefore, . . ., forward!"

(Paul Klee (Felix Klee, editor), *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898-1918*. U of California P, 1968, pp. 140-1.)

"A traffic light, with or without special pedestrian signals is found or positioned on street corner or at stage center.

Performer(s) wait at real or imaginary curb on red signal, alerts self on yellow signal, crosses street or stage on green signal. Achieving opposite side, performer(s) turns, repeats sequence. A performance may consist of an infinite, undetermined or predetermined number of repetitions."

(Benjamin Patterson, *A Lawful Dance* (1962), in Lori Waxman, *Keep Walking Intently: The Ambulatory Art of the Surrealists, the Situationist International, and Fluxus*. Sternberg Press, 2017, p. 238.)

“The dialectical image is a way of seeing that crystallizes antithetical elements by providing the axes of their alignment. Benjamin’s conception is essentially static . . . He charts philosophical ideas visually within an unreconciled and transitory field of oppositions that can perhaps best be pictured in terms of coordinates of contradictory terms, the ‘synthesis’ of which is not a movement toward resolution, but the point at which their axes intersect . . . His unfolding of concepts in their ‘extremes’ can be visualized as antithetical polarities of axes that cross each other, revealing a ‘dialectal image’ at the null point, with its contradictory ‘moments’ as its axial fields.”

(Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. MIT Press, 1991, p. 210.)

“What was otherwise reserved for only a few words . . . the city has made possible for all words, or at least a great many; to be elevated to the noble status of name. This revolution in language was carried out by what is most general: the street.”

(Walter Benjamin, (Howard Eiland and Kevin McLoughlin, translators), *The Arcades Project*. Belknap Press of the Harvard UP, 1999, p. 522.)

“They both started out from a figure of the circle. And they stay there . . . The treatment of the circle is part of the history of art and is delimited in it as much as it delimits it. . . . Circle of circles . . . How could a circle place itself *en abyme*? . . . In order to be abyssal, the smallest circle must inscribe in itself the figure of the largest. *Is there* any abyss in the Hegelian circulation? To the question posed in this form there is no decidable answer . . . I note only this: *the answer arrests the abyss, unless it be already dragged down into it in advance. And can be in it without*

knowing it . . . the indecision of the structures of inclusion which throws en abyme.”

(Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (1987), qtd. in Kathleen League, *Adorno, Radical Negativity, and Cultural Critique: Utopia in the Map of the World*. Lexington Books, 2010, p. 47.)

“Nothing ever but lifeless words.”

(Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, qtd. in Kleinberg-Levin, *Beckett's Words: The Promise of Happiness in a Time of Mourning*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, p. 170.)

“What sets apart the language that takes dialectics seriously is conscious rejection of a positivity of language that assumes words can wholly represent or define things; at every step, the thing resists, or even thwarts the very effort to bring it to linguistic articulation. As Adorno describes, ‘[N]o matter how hard we try for linguistic expression of such a history congealed in things, the words we use will remain concepts. Their precision substitutes for the thing itself, without quite bringing its selfhood to mind; there is a gap between worlds and the things they conjure.’ Negative dialectical language must recognize the constraining, historical character of the non-identity or non-coincidence of word and thing, yet it must also strive to reach the thing through words.”

(Michale K. Palamarek, “Adorno’s Dialectical Language,” in Donald Burke, Colin J. Campbell, Kathy Kiloh, Michael Palamarek, and Jonathan Short, editors, *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*. U of Toronto P, 2007, pp. 64-5.)

“We believe we are at home in the immediate circle of beings. That which is, is familiar, reliable, ordinary. Nevertheless, the clearing is pervaded by a constant concealment in the double form of refusal and dissembling. At bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extra-ordinary, uncanny.”

(Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, in Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. Ohio UP, 2012, p. 324.)

“Today the philosopher confronts disintegrated language. The ruins of words are his material, to which history binds him; his freedom is solely the possibility of their configuration according to the force as pre-given as to invent a word.”

(Adorno, “Theses on the Language of Philosophy,” in Burke, Campbell, Kiloh, Palamarek, and Short, editors, *Adorno and the Need in Thinking*, p. 37.)

“The signal is regulated in such a way that on our side the red light lasts a hundred and eighty seconds and the green light a hundred and twenty, no doubt based on the premise that the perpendicular traffic is heavier and slower. A mistaken premise; calculating the cars I see going by transversely when it is green for them, I would say they are about twice the number of those that in an equally long period manage to break free of our column and pass the signal. This doesn’t mean that, once beyond it, they speed: in reality they go forward with exasperating slowness, which can be considered speed only compared to us since we are virtually motionless with red and green alike. It is also partially the fault of this slowness of theirs that we don’t succeed in moving, because when the green goes off for them and comes on for us the intersection is still occupied by their wave, blocked there in the center, and thus at least thirty of one hundred and twenty seconds are lost before a single tire can revolve once here on our side. It must be said that the transverse flow does indeed inflict this delay on us but when it is compensated for by a loss of forty and sometimes sixty seconds before starting again when the green comes light period remains a deadlock for a longer and longer time on both sides, and this deadlock works more against our progress than theirs.”

(Italo Calvino, (William Weaver, translator), *t zero*. Harvest Book, 1967, pp. 113-114.)

“Every writer,” [Monique] Wittig writes, “should take words one by one and strip them of their everyday meaning in order to be able to work, with words, on words.”

(Monique Wittig, *La pensée straight*, in Epps and Katz, *Monique Wittig: At the Crossroads of Criticism*. Duke UP, 2007, p. 443.)

“The combination of words in the concrete utterance or the literary performance is always determined by their value coefficients and the social conditions under which the utterance is produced.”

(Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1991, p. 124.)

“What we would call ‘explosive metaphors’ . . . draws concretization into a process, in which it is at first able to follow along (e.g., conceiving the greatest possible, that is, infinite, radius of a circle) where it has to give up – and this is understood as ‘giving itself up’ as well.”

(Hans Blumenberg, “Paradigmen zu einer metaphorologie,” in Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*. MIT Press, 1996, pp. 119-120.)

“Words exist at the frontier between the will to live and its repression; the way they are employed determines their meaning; history controls the way they are employed.”

(Raoul Vanegem, *Revolution in Everyday Life* (1983), in Susan McManus, "Theorizing Utopian Agency: Two Steps Toward Utopian Techniques of the Self," *Theory and Event* vol. 10, 2007, p. 1.)

"The interaction of the individual with big-city traffic is another prototypical representation of this conflicting but highly stimulating experience. In Benjamin's words: "Moving through the traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery. Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into the crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy." For Benjamin, the Baudelairean crowd thus constitutes a prefiguration of the public at the cinema. In the encounter with hectic traffic and tumultuous streets, the mid-nineteenth-century individual received a training in shock analogous to that of film's formal principle of interrupted perception."

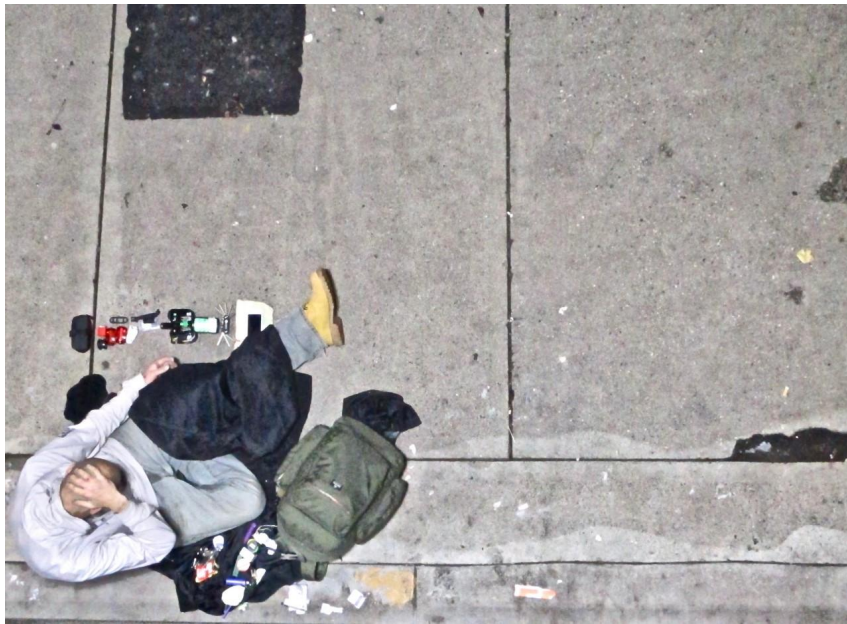
(Humberto Beck, *The Moment of Rupture: Historical Consciousness in Interwar German Thought*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2019, p. 133.)

"Contemporary theories of allegory thus grasp this structure as the intersection of two principles: that of the autonomy, or complete isolation and non-dependence of their items (which are in that sense not fragments) and at the same time as the marking of those items as conceptually incomplete, as relational terms in a larger signifying structure. Both of these features are then combined in the self-designation of allegory as a process rather than any achieved structure or substance. Allegory thus looks back to hallucination as a perceptual isolation of its objects, and forward to the "part-object" as the exemplification of a larger drive that can never be fully satisfied."

(Frederic Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Verso, 2017, p. 126.)

“The ‘modern,’ the time of hell. The punishments of hell are always the newest thing going in this domain. What is at issue is not that “the same thing happens over and over,” and even less would it be a question here of eternal return. It is rather that precisely in that which is newest the face of the world never alters, that this newest remains, in every respect the same – This constitutes the eternity of hell. To determine the totality of traits by which the ‘modern’ is defined would be to represent hell.”

(Benjamin (Eiland and McLaughlin, translators), *The Arcades Project*, p. 544.)



Scott Saunders, “Untitled.” (2020) Digital Photograph.

“I ask ‘Is it true, good ladies and gentlemen, that the earth of Man is for all

human beings as you say? In that case
Where is my little house, and where am I?””

(M. Darwish, "Unfortunately, it was Paradise," qtd. in Janet Wilson, Christina Sandru, and Sarah Lawrence Welsh, editors), *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for a New Millennium*. Routledge, 2010, p. 92.)

"The temptation to juridify the right to the city, and to embed it within legislative and human rights instruments, is ever present among parts of the political left, non-government organisations and activists wishing to make a strategic use of the legal system to pursue social justice in an urban context. While I do not wish to reject all such proposals out of hand, it should be remembered that [Henri] Lefebvre specifically resists framing the right to the city as a legal entitlement because he envisages it as a means for contesting both state power and legal individualism, through the transformation of urban space and institutions that govern it. One of the real dangers of reducing the right to the city to either a 'natural' or a 'contractual right' is that its radical and 'futural' orientation will become subsumed within a utilitarian agenda of distributive justice applied to urban space. There is certainly some value in the . . . right to the city may provide the basis for new models of spatial citizenship that destabilize existing liberal-democratic forms of citizenship and challenge the dominance of capitalist social relations. But such models are only credible if the right to the city is pursued simultaneously with the right to difference as part of a generalized spatial politics . . ."

(Chris Butler, *Henri Lefebvre, Spatial Politics, Everyday Life, and the Right to the City*. Routledge, 2010, p. 157-8.)

"Breaking holes in the wall, they found nothing.
The homeless squatters passed through the holes . . .
Into a world unbearable to them."

(Carolyn Forché, *The Angel of History*. Harper Perennial Publishing, 1995, p. 49.)

“Words. Everything I tried to convey about that experience was, and is, paraphrase. We have no name for what spoke out of me. I was its mouth, and not of my own free will. It had to subdue me before I would breathe a word it suggested. It was the enemy who spread the tale that I spoke ‘the truth’ and that you all would not listen to me. They did not spread it out of malice, that was just how they understood it. For the Greeks there is no alternative but either truth or lies, right or wrong, victory or defeat, friend or enemy, life or death.”

(Christa Wolf, *Cassandra*. Daunt Books, 2013, p. 155.)



“Art always echoes with the screech of icebergs scraping against the ship, keeping it from moving forward.”

(Viktor Shklovsky (Serena Vitale and Jamie Richards, Translators), *Shklovsky: Witness to an Era*. Dalkey Archive Press, 2012, p. 92.)

“My word I poured. But was it cognate, scored
Of that tribunal monarch of the air
Whose thigh embronzes earth, strikes crystal Word
In wounds pledged once to hope, – cleft to despair?”

(Hart Crane, “Voyages, VI,” qtd. In Marjorie Perloff, “Unoriginal Genius: Walter Benjamin’s Arcades as Paradigm for the New Poetics,” *Études Anglaises* vol. 61, no. 2, 2008, pp. 229-252.)

“New constellations of meanings crystallize as every word – each with a multiplicity of meanings – enters into new relations with another. Here we find a pedagogy rooted in fantasy and the deformation of existing meanings . . .”

(Sam Dolbear, Esther Leslie, and Sebastian Truskolaski, “Introduction: Walter Benjamin and the Magnetic Play of Words,” qtd. in Benjamin (Translated and edited by Sam Dolbear, Esther Leslie, and Sebastian Truskolaski), *The Storyteller: Tales Out of Loneliness*. Verso, 2016, pp. xxv-xxvi.)

“Art emigrates to a standpoint that is no longer a standpoint at all because there are no longer standpoints from which the catastrophe could be named.”

(Adorno, *Trying to Understand Endgame*, in Gordon, *Adorno and Existence*, p. 114.)

“The Road of Excess leads to the Palace of Wisdom.”

(William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in (Richard J. Lane and Miguel Mota, editors), *Malcolm Lowry’s Poetics of Space*. U of Ottawa P, 2016, p. 20.)

“Words are never merely signs of what is thought under them, but rather history erupts into words, establishing their truth-character. The share of history in the word unfailingly determines the choice of every word because history and truth meet in the word.”

(Adorno, “Theses on the Language of the Philosopher,” in Burke, Campbell, Kiloh, Palamarek, and Short, editors, *Adorno and the Need in Thinking*, p. 36.)

“Allegory is . . . that which conquers time, that which perpetually renews the written word.”

(Morton W. Bloomfield, “Allegory as Interpretation,” qtd. in Paul A. Bové, “Misprisions of Utopia: Messianism, Apocalypse, and Allegory,” in *Field Day Review* vol. 6, 2010, p. 80.)

“Words exist at the frontier between the will to live and its repression; the way they are employed determines their meaning; history controls the way they are employed.”

(Raoul Vaneigem, *Revolution in Everyday Life* (1983), qtd. in Susan McManus, “Theorizing Utopian Agency: Two Steps Toward Utopian Techniques of the Self,” *Theory and Event*, vol. 3, no. 10, 2007, p. 1.)

“– the concrete poet sees the word in itself – a magnetic field of possibilities – like a dynamic object, a live cell, a complete organism, with psycho-chemical proprieties, touch antennae circulation heart: live.”

(Augusto de Campos, “Concrete Poetry: A Manifesto,” in Louis Armand, editor, *Contemporary Poetics*. Northwestern UP, 2007, p. 213.)

“Just as fragments of a vessel, in order to be articulated together, must follow one another in the smallest detail but need not resemble one

another, so, instead of making itself similar to the meaning of the original, the translation must rather, lovingly and in detail, in its own language, form itself according to the manner of meaning [*Art des Meinens*] of the original, to make both recognizable as the broken part of a greater language, just as fragments are the broken part of a vessel.”

(Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” qtd. in Carol Jacobs, *In the Language of Walter Benjamin*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1999, p. 84.)

“Split between grammar and rhetoric, the poem is held open and in suspense, and it is through such fissures – through the very failure of the text to be one, to be whole, together, complete, and not least of all punishable in the poet’s name during his lifetime – that it leaves itself open to the coming of another.”

(Michael G. Levine, *A Weak Messianic Power: Figures of a Time to Come in Benjamin, Derrida, and Celan*. Fordham UP, 2013, p. 116.)

“But the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other’s term: it is in vain that we say what we are, what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying: the space where they achieve their splendor is not deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax.”

(Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (1966), qtd. in Joseph J. Tanke, *Foucault’s Philosophy of Art: A Genealogy of Modernity*. Continuum Publishing, 2009, p. 20.)

“What it comes down to, again, is a siege of words: “It was the need to pacify those words, suspend for a moment their agitated flight through the

house, bring them back, also, to themselves by keeping them away from the feverish earth, that obliged me to ask myself if I shouldn't write – now.”

(Maurice Blanchot, *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas*, in Bruns, *Interruptions*, p. 41.)

“Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to socialism or regression into barbarism.”

(Rosa Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy*, in Peter Fraser, *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism*. Verso, 2016, p. 27.)

“The ‘weapons of the word’ that remain for the poet are shadowed memory traces . . .”

(Friedrich Hölderlin, “At the Source of the Danube,” in Theodor W. Adorno (Sherry Weber Nicholsen, translator; Rolf Tiedemann, editor), *Notes on Literature, Volume Two*. Columbia UP, 1974, p. 116.)

“Awkwardly, our writerly alternatives are necessarily utopian; they can only be charted negatively as the kind of language we use. Though it certainly could be worse, our situation – to be sure! – isn't the best of all possible worlds. And no amount of tinkering can change one basic fact – to write is not the same as to act, nor will be in our foreseeable futures. Writings can even be obstacles to future developments; one can so easily think of the repressive, as well as imaginative, side of language in its past behaviors. Yet if a person were to ask me, I would always claim there are reasons enough to hope, if we only see what is actually happening around us.”

(Bruce Boone, *Century of Clouds*. Hoddypoll Press, 1980, p. 15.)

“The essential emptiness of modern life is obscured behind an elaborate and spectacular array of commodities and our immersion in this world of rampant consumerism leaves us disconnected from the history and community that might give our lives meaning. Amidst this relentless and regimented monotony, street life has been suppressed and the same hostility to the pedestrian that drove the *flâneur* from the streets of nineteenth-century Paris continues unabated today. The urban wanderer has been subordinated to the ‘dictatorship of the automobile’ as a new urban landscape emerges, a non-place dominated by technology and advertising whose endless reflective surfaces are devoid of individuality.”

(Coverley, *Psychogeography*, p. 103.)

“For this middleman [*Mittler*] could be what he was only by having the most acute perceptions of extremes.”

(Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2: 217, qtd. in James McFarland, *Constellation: Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin in the Now-Time of History*. Fordham UP, 2012, p. 189.)

“Walter Benjamin could not have foreseen at what crossroads he would stand in our day. For us he stands less at the crossroads of literature and politics, or Marxism and religion, rather, he stands at the crossroads of criticism and theory, a barricade of our own construction. His historical materialism would draw him to theorists; his awareness of the authority of *Verwirrung* – the Kabbalistic promise of all antinomies resolved in a reinterpreted world. Even Adorno, his fellow dialectician, more rigorous than Benjamin himself writes: ‘the idea of harmony is expressed negatively by embodying contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure.’”

(Peter Brier, “Walter Benjamin’s Sparks of Holiness,” *SouthWest Review* vol. 88, no.1, 2003, p. 88.)

“Can we call this a “critical art?” According to Debord, we must. He insists that

a critical art can be carried out within the existing means of cultural expression, from cinema to painting – even though we ultimately wish to destroy this entire artistic framework. This critical art is what the situationists have summed up in their theory of *détournement*. Such an art must not only be critical in its content, it must also be self-critical in its form.”

(Richard Gilman-Opalsky, *Specters of Revolt: On the Intellect of Insurrection and Philosophy from Below*. Repeater Books, 2016, p. 139.)

“It is the interchange the form took
like walking in and out of a star
the words are left over collapsed

between visible and invisible.”

(Robin Blaser, “The Holy Forest,” in Glazier, *Digital Poetics*, p. 59.)

“Get the nothingness back into words. The aim is words with nothing to them; words that point beyond themselves rather than to themselves; transparencies, empty words. Empty words, corresponding to the void in things.”

(Stephane Mallarmé, in Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body*. U of California P, 1966, p. 259.)

“I have seen too many illusions
Pass from green to red.”

(Kateb Yacine, "Poesía, Textos," in (Plasencia, editor), *Luis Claramunt: El viatge vertical*. Barcelona: Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona, 1997, p. 251.)

"The interruption of language, the suspension of language, the *caesura* ('counter-rhythmic rupture,' said Hölderlin) – that is poetry, then. '[Robbed] . . . of breath and speech,' the 'turn' of breath, the 'turn at the end of inspiration.' Poetry occurs where language, contrary to all expectations, gives way. Precisely at inspiration's failing – and this can be understood in at least two senses. Or, even more precisely, at retained expiration, the breath-holding: when speaking (discoursing) is about to continue, and someone, suddenly free, forbids what was to be said. When a word occurs in the pure suspension of speech. Poetry is the spasm or syncope of language. Hölderlin called the caesura 'the pure word.'"

(Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, in Levine, *A Weak Messianic Power*, p. 139.)

"We can repeat that which has been said. But that which has been thought can never be said again. You take your leave forever of the word once it has been thought."

(Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*. U of Minnesota P, 2006, p. 108.)

"If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word."

(T.S. Eliot, “Ash Wednesday,” qtd. in Marcia Cavalcante-Schuback, “Still/ Encore,” in (Patricia Vieira and Michael Marder, editors), *Existential Utopia: New Perspectives on Utopian Thought*. Continuum Press, 2012, p. 54.)

“It sometimes happens, of course, when for example you are too deep into the rocks, overlooked by crags, no trace of vegetation – too high, too hard, tracks of pebbles and scree – that you despair a little, feel very isolated . . . excluded, so to speak. It only takes the threat of a lowering black sky to render the feeling of unbearable very quickly, insurmountable almost. Your throat tightens and you rush down the hard paths with anxious haste. It’s impossible to walk alone for too long like that, in the crushing silence of immense blocks of stone: your own tread echoes with incredible violence. Here your breathing, moving body is a scandal, a spot of life in a cold, haughty, definitive, eternal minerality that rejects is. It happens too on days of rain or fog, when you can’t see anything, and are just a body, perished with cold and advancing in the middle of nowhere.”

(Frederick Gros, (John Howe, translator), *A Philosophy of Walking*. Verso, 2015, p. 57.)

“Our sensibilities grow numb to the monstrosity of Big Other as its features are developed, tested, elaborated, and normalized. We become deaf to the lullaby of walls. Hiding from the machines and their masters drifts from the obsession of the vanguard to a normal theme of social discourse and eventually our conversations around the dinner table. Each step down this path as if in the fog of war: scattered fragments and incidents that appear abruptly and often in obscurity. There is little room to perceive the pattern let alone its origins and meaning. Nonetheless, each deletion of the possibility of sanctuary leaves a void that is seamlessly and soundlessly filled by the new conditions of instrumentarian power.”

(Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for Human Nature at the New Frontiers of Power*. Hachette Book Group, 2019, p. 492.)

“In the century-long struggle between socialism and barbarism, the latter is a length ahead of the former. We enter the twenty-first century with less hope than our ancestors at the edge of the twentieth.”

(Daniel Bensaïd, *Jeanne De Guerre Lasse*, (1991) qtd. in Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory*. Columbia UP, 2017, p. 1.)

“What forgetting awakens at this crossroads is, in fact, the very aporia that is at the source of the problematical character of the representation of the past, namely, memory’s lack of reliability. Forgetting is the challenge par excellence put to memory’s aim of reliability. The trustworthiness of memories hangs on the enigma constitutive of the entire problematic of memory, namely, the dialectic of presence and absence at the heart of the representation of the past, to which is added the feeling of distance proper to memories, unlike the simple absence of the image, which it serves to depict or to simulate. The problematic of forgetting, formulated on the level of greatest depth intervenes at the most critical point of this problematic of presence, of absence, and of distance, at the opposite pole from the minor miracle of a happy memory which is constituted by the actual recognition of past memories.”

(Paul Ricoeur (Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, translators), *Memory, History, Forgetting*. U of Chicago P, 2006, p. 414.)

“The simple act of moving information from one place to another today constitutes a significant cultural act in and of itself.”

(Ken Goldsmith, “Being Boring” (2005), in Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism: or The Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism*. Stanford UP, 2012, p. 167.)

“What the poet sees is language in the present moment or condition. ‘Clean, gather, assemble: poetry becomes fieldwork,’ Gus Blaisdell reasons [discussing the poet Marianne Moore], ‘an archaeology not in past cultures but in the immediate sediment that surrounds the poet.’ . . . Picking ‘up rags of words in the abandoned alleys of language’ and releasing words from prior obligations . . .”

(Ross Hair, *Ronald Johnson’s Modernist Collage Poetry*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 179.)

“Awkwardly, our writerly alternatives are necessarily utopian; they can only be charted negatively as the kind of language we use. Though it certainly could be worse, our situation – to be sure! – isn’t the best of all possible worlds. And no amount of tinkering can change one basic fact – to write is not the same as to act, nor will be in our foreseeable futures. Writings can even be obstacles to future developments; one can so easily think of the repressive, as well as imaginative, side of language in its past behaviors. Yet if a person were to ask me, I would always claim there are reasons enough to hope, if we only see what is actually happening around us.”

(Bruce Boone, *Century of Clouds*. Nightboat, 2009, p. 15.)

“I do not undertake to insure the ship of fools.”

(Karl Marx, letter to Arnold Ruge, January 25, 1843, qtd. in Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*. Verso, 2018, p. 275.)

“The ship of fools was heavily loaded with meaning, and clearly carried a great social force . . . The madman on his crazy boat sets sail for the other world, and it is from the other world that he comes when he disembarks. This enforced navigation is both rigorous division and absolute Passage, serving to underline in real and imaginary terms the *liminal* situation of the mad in medieval society. It was a highly symbolic role, made clear by the mental geography involved, where the madman was *confined at the gates of the cities*. His exclusion was his confinement, and if he had no *prison* other than the threshold *itself* he was still detained at this place of passage.

A prisoner in the midst of the ultimate freedom, . . . he is the Passenger *par excellence*, the prisoner of the passage. It is not known where he will land, and when he lands, he knows not whence he came. His truth and his home are the barren wasteland between two lands that can never be his own . . . The link between water and madness is deeply rooted in the dream of the Western man.”

(Michel Foucault, *The History of Madness*, in Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine*. Duke UP, 2019, pp. 209-210.)

“Every line we succeed in publishing today – no matter how uncertain the future to which we entrust it – is a victory wrenched from the powers of darkness.”

(Walter Benjamin qtd. in Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*. Haymarket Books, 2016, p. 69.)

“These fragments I have shared against my ruins.”

(T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1980, p. 50.)